

Remembering the Maine

or

Johnnie, April 10, 1927, Oakland Calif

Here's a wavy print of you, Dad, in black, white, and gray,
spectacles peeking from a salvaged torpedo port
of the U. S. S. Maine, which blew to bits
in Cuba some 30 years before. On a trip with Maurice and Sue,
you're far from home, driving through California wearing

a suit coat although it looks near noon.
The fierce wind and unrelenting sun make you
want a drink, to roll up your sleeves, maybe peel
down to your undershirt. Let's hope you found a crab
shack somewhere with fresh fish and cold beer.

I bet the week was Maurice's idea. We might
as well travel, he'd say, our old man took to it.
The snapshots from Sue's camera
show how the wind whipped so the first time
you saw the Pacific, peaceful it's not.

Imagine--the torpedo port that frames your smile
might have been the last thing a sailor saw before
that February night exploded. This salvaged
memento has been hauled across country.
Does it honor a local man?

You never swim that whole trip, wild wind, harsh coast.
no time. Once a broken-down trucker
said something to Sue and you had to leave because
he was so drunk, and there's no telling with drinking.
That night, in the little place off the highway, where

seashells outlined the paths and beds, all in a row,
like Mary Contrary's garden, the lime trees
so precious they could grace a doll house lawn,
you could still hear that furious wind.
History says the Maine brought us to war though

I don't recall -- was it an explosion or a fire?
It's like explaining this photo, to which I must
give a story. Truth is, I don't know, so I make it up,
your life and trips--you. Well, most of you.
The wind doesn't cease, that's what you seem to say,

the man, whose smile in the mirror, I look for still.

Copyright © **Ellen Wade Beals**

